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THE NICODEMUS COLONY OF GRAHAM COUNTY, KANSAS

being

A thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Fort Hays Kansas State College in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science

by

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Fort Hays Kansas State College

Date July 15, 1943

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research is to portray the beginning, later growth, decline, and present status of a colony near Bogue, Kansas. The colony in question is the Nicodemus Colony. The motive lying back of the problem is to present the development of this colony in order that people regardless of race, may learn of the trials and tribulations the Negro pioneers lived through in this colony in Graham County.

Values in studies of this character are as follows: first, the story should be preserved as a contribution to the history of western Kansas and to the state as a whole; second, the promotion of a better understanding and realization of the relationships involved between races and the part which education plays in refining these relationships. Peoples of different races make up communities in many places. Since this is true, it is imperative that they understand each other better. A third value suggested is this, the study brings together in compact form a large amount of carefully assembled, reliable information, about this colony otherwise found in scattered periodicals, newspapers, public records, and correspondence.

In so far as historic record is concerned, no previous study of the Nicodemus Colony has been made. However, research similar in nature has been made covering the history of certain communities in western Kansas. One of these was made at Fort Hays Kansas State College by Burtis E. Taylor. This was a master's thesis, 1939, in which he investigated the economic status of a certain class of individuals living in Graham County. Some of the people in his study live in the Colony of Nicodemus.

Other related studies somewhat similar in nature of western Kansas are the following: in 1937 Mrs. Marjorie G. Raish, a graduate student in the Fort Hays Kansas State College, used as her problem, "Victoria, The Story of a Western Kansas Town" as a thesis. Marvin A. Hubert in 1939, also a student in the Fort Hays Kansas State College, chose for his thesis, "The Economic Development of Gray County, Kansas" and B. Z. Woods in 1932 used for his thesis "A History of Fort Larned." These theses were of general value in working out the technique in the present thesis.

Two other theses were of special value since each covered some aspect of the study of the Negro in Kansas. They were also of further value in that, being similar in nature, they were useful in working out techniques to be used in the study of The Nicodemus Colony.

L. G. Smith in 1932 at the University of Wichita,

Wichita, Kansas, made the problem of his thesis "The Early Negro in Kansas." This thesis was of particular value in giving historic perspective of the coming of the Negro in Kansas. Charles L. Shepherd in 1934 at the Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, Kansas, in his thesis worked out "The Educational Status of the Negro in Kansas." It was suggestive in methods, sources of data and organization.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of a study of this kind is the forgetfulness due to age of persons interviewed now living in relation to events which happened sixty or more years ago. However, the effort has been made to critically take into consideration the capacity of the individuals interviewed, as well as their opportunity to have observed actual conditions and events prevailing at the time.

A second limitation is the meager education of the ex-slaves that were interviewed.

Some of the early county records were not complete or accurate.

Organization

The story of the Colony is in chronological order with much attention given to the present. Chapter II

covers the period of colonization from 1877 to 1890. This period is the background out of which the thesis grows and its conclusions and suggestions derived. The chapter includes a study of population as well as the social and religious life of the colony.

Another division covered in Chapter III is the problem of education in the colony, as well as the legal status of the Negro in the school.

A third major division is Chapter IV covering the "Contemporary Life of the Negro." Here is portrayed the economic, industrial and political life of the Colony together with the Negro and the conditions under which he lives.

Sources of Data

The data for this study have been obtained mainly from the following named sources:

(1) County Records. Historical information on the organization and population of the Colony.

(2) Personal Interviews. Direct observation and contact with Negro pioneers depicting and unfolding the story of the settlement of Nicodemus Colony. Their story begins from the time they were slaves in Kentucky and continues to the present time, thus developing the following areas of life: population, social, religious, education,

economic, industrial, and political.

(3) County Newspapers. The Hill City Times, The Bogue Messenger, and other newspapers have contributed by supplying the writer with stories of the Founding of the Nicodemus Colony of Graham County, Kansas.

(4) Community Files. Letters, clippings, poems, from community files have helped the writer in the portrayal of the Colony. The writer has secured pictures of some of the early pioneers as well as pictures of a few of the old buildings in the Colony which will help also in its portrayal.

The last major division is found in Chapter V in which is presented a summary of the findings, generalizations, conclusions, and values of the study.

CHAPTER II

PERIOD OF COLONIZATION

In the short grass country a few miles west of Stockton on the South Solomon River is the Nicodemus Colony.¹ This colony was located near the mouth of Spring Creek, eleven miles east and a little north of Hill City, the county seat, and six miles northeast of Bogue, the nearest shipping point. A stage line ran through the town from Stockton to Bogue.² The name of Nicodemus includes not only the little village, but the community of colored people located on farms in that vicinity.³

The colony is an example of what has been done with the Southern negro in western Kansas. In the fall of 1877 and the following spring about five hundred ex-slaves came from the farming regions about Lexington and Georgetown, Kentucky. No doubt among the 500 there were some children. In the previous year W. R. Hill, a real estate man (white) of Hill City, in Graham County, in company with several negro ministers and philanthropists conceived the idea and perfected the plan for settling the colony at this place, then a part of Rooks County.⁴ Graham County had not been

1. The Kansas City Star, January 26, 1905, p. 3.

2. The Nicodemus Enterprise, August 24, 1887, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 1.

3. W. L. Sayers, Manuscript: Nicodemus, the Negro Community.

4. The Kansas City Star, loc. cit.

organized at that time, and its territory was attached to Rooks County, for administrative purposes.⁵

In Georgetown, Scott County, Kentucky, near George Moore's home, there came to the little colored Baptist Church one night a white man expounding the theories of a negro colony in Western Kansas. With many others, George listened to the stories of the wonderful opportunities for the colored man out on the prairies where one hundred and sixty acres of land could be had for the asking, where horses were running wild but could be caught and tamed and turned into beasts of burden for doing farm work; where game was plentiful and would supply their every want in the meat line; where the colored man clasped hands with the white man as his equal; where there were no Jim Crow laws to humiliate the race. The great out-of-doors could be reclaimed with but little effort and bounteous crops would result.⁶

In those days the colored people of the southern plantations were but a few years removed from slavery. Their opportunities in the south were few and, with but little knowledge of the outside world, their future looked dark.⁷

The expounder of the theories in that little country

5. W. L. Sayers, Manuscript: Nicodemus, the Negro Community.

6. The Rooks County Record, March 29, 1934.

7. Ibid.

Baptist Church that night was none other than W. R. Hill, the founder of Hill City and Nicodemus. He had come to what is now the townsite of Hill City in 1876 and had brought with him a few colored men with the view of establishing a colony for the colored people of the South. He later returned to Kentucky, told them of the opportunities which awaited them and was successful in bringing more negroes to the new colony of Nicodemus, most of them arriving in the fall of 1877 and the spring of 1878.⁸

So far as W. R. Hill was concerned, the colonizing scheme was a success. He was a modern Moses, leading these colored people, not out of the wilderness, but into the wilderness. George Moore, an ex-slave from Kentucky, was then a young man of 23 years, full of life and vigor, and ready to do his part in the building up of a new country. Moore was one of 208 who paid their railroad fare to Ellis, the nearest railroad point, and then traveled across to Nicodemus, where he helped to establish this new city of dugouts.⁹

Old settlers on the road between Nicodemus and Kirwin, the nearest land office, tell of seeing Hill walking barefooted, with his trousers frayed to the knees from walking through the grass and brush, on his way to look

8. The Rooks County Record, March 29, 1934.

9. Ibid.

after the interest of the colonists. The early annals of the colony almost equal the story of the Pilgrim Fathers for tales of hardship endured. Very few had horses or teams at first, and it was not an unusual occurrence for a man to walk to Ellis, a distance of forty miles, and carry home a sack of flour and other provisions for his family. The fuel of the country at that time consisted of buffalo chips, sunflowers and willows of the thickness of a man's thumb.¹⁰

The colonists found the country somewhat different, however, from what it had been pictured to them in the little church in Kentucky. The wild horses were not there to be caught; much of the game had passed on to other territory; and, as to their being on an equal footing with the white man, there were but few white men to be seen as their own colony was near the western post of civilization at that time.¹¹

The village of Nicodemus grew rapidly, but was for several years a community of dugouts. The entire colony had but little money. Hardships beset them on every hand. Many of them returned to the southland, while others remained to fight the battles of the new country.¹²

A poetical genius among them composed a song of

10. The Kansas City Star, January 26, 1905, p. 3.

11. The Rooks County Record, March 29, 1934.

12. Ibid.

several stanzas, sung to the tune of "Beulah Land", which gave a fair idea of their trials. Here is one stanza:

We went away a while last fall
A month or so, and that was all;
We earned enough to last us through,
Up to this time we've made it do.

Chorus:

Oh, Kansas Sun, Hot Kansas Sun!
As to the highest bluff we run,
And look away across the plain
And wonder if it ne'er will rain
And as we look upon our corn¹³
We think but little of our farm.

The pioneers, whose ambitions lifted them out of the ranks in which their lives had been cast, and, in spite of prejudice, hardships, and untold sufferings, placed themselves on a higher plane in the civic life of our nation.¹⁴

The freedmen were permitted to exercise the right of franchise quite generally for a time during the Reconstruction of the South. In 1877, finding themselves losing ground in connection with the franchise and the enjoyment of political rights, there was unrest among the freedmen. They were dissatisfied with both the political and the economic outlook for the race.¹⁵

Out in Western Kansas, there lay the broad prairies of the Great American Desert, a wild country from which

13. The Kansas City Star, January 26, 1905, p. 3.

14. The Bogue Messenger, February 18, 1932, Vol. 1, No. 8.

15. Ibid.

antelope and the buffalo had not disappeared--a country dominated by cowboys and occupied by cattle ranches. One disappointed immigrant described it as a country infested with rattlesnakes, coyotes and tarantulas, pestered by fleas and damned by Kansas droughts; but for all of that, it was Kansas, a free country with political and economic equality for all.¹⁶

Not only was it a free country in relation to liberty of the person, but the broad acres of prairie constituting the land of that country were also free--free to homesteaders, black and white alike. The colonists had set their minds on establishing a community of black men, by black men and for black men. They came by rail to Ellis, Kansas, a distance of 40 miles from their goal, and then trekked their way across the trackless plains as best they could to the location that had been selected for them--some going on foot, some in wagons which they had brought from Kentucky and some hired freighters to haul them and their effects to their destination.¹⁷

But they finally reached their goal--a prairie quarter section, just north of the south branch of the Solomon River,--just a plain prairie country, no houses, no wells, no shelter of any kind and winter setting in.¹⁸ It was

No. 8. 16. The Bogue Messenger, February 18, 1932, Vol. 1,

17. Ibid., February 25, 1932, Vol. 1, No. 9.

18. Ibid.

unfortunate in getting settled so late in the season as to be unable to make any provisions for the first winter. The Negroes in the spring, with only three horses in the settlement, put in wheat and other crops with hoes and mattocks, and in the harvest season pulled the grain with their hands. After the harvest season, they would walk to eastern Kansas and to Colorado in search of work, while the women and children held down the claims. These immigrants conducted probably the first successful attempts of the freed people to occupy, under the Homestead Law, the public lands of the United States.¹⁹ Their condition on coming was pitiable in the extreme and much organized relief was given them.²⁰

Though foot sore and fatigued, the colonists were courageous and determined. They organized a government townsite company and filed on a quarter section of Government land, and named it Nicodemus.²¹ The Nicodemus charter was issued in 1877, with the following officers: W. H. Smith, (colored) president; Berry Carry, vice-president; S. P. Roundtree, (colored) secretary; W. R. Hill, manager and locator.²²

19. Prentis, History of Kansas, p. 153.

20. Notes on Kansas History, Vol. II, No. 5, pp. 49, by James H. Beach, March 1911, Hays, Kansas.

21. The Bogue Messenger, February 25, 1932, Vol. 1, No. 9.

22. The Topeka State Journal, January 7, 1922.

The writer is not certain as to the origin of the name "Nicodemus." One source states that Nicodemus was named in honor of the slave, Nicodemus, who it is said gained fame by buying his freedom.²³ He came in the second slave ship which landed on the shores of America. This is a part of the song written to his memory:

Nicodemus was a slave of African birth,
And was bought for a bagful of gold,
He was reckoned as a part of the salt of the earth,
And he died years ago, very old.

Nicodemus was a prophet, at heart he was wise,
For he told of the battles to come;
How we trembled with fear when he rolled up his eyes,
And we heeded the shake of his thumb.

The chorus was changed by the promoters of the colony to read:

Go tell Elijah to hurry up, Pomp,
And meet us under the cotton wood tree,
In the great South Solomon valley to build up
The city of Nicodemus at the break of the day.²⁴

Another source states that the leaders of the colony were religious men, hence the name was taken from the scriptures. It relates too that Nicodemus, the Ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus by night.²⁵

The next job was to dig in. They had no funds to buy lumber and money would not buy lumber in Nicodemus.

23. Blackmar, Cyclopedia of Kansas History, Vol. II, pp. 369-370.

24. The Kansas City Star, January 26, 1905, p. 3.

25. The Bogue Messenger, February 25, 1932, Vol. 1, No. 9.

With pick and spade they dug out caves in the dry ground, covered them with brush and dirt, named them dugouts, and moved their families in. And what a home for human occupation--unplastered dirt walls and ceilings, unvarnished dirt floors! But, these homes were occupied by owners and not by tenants.²⁶

It was in one of these "dugout" homes that the first colored child of Nicodemus Colony as well as of Graham County was born. Henry Williams, whose parents came in the second colony September 17, 1877, was born October 30, 1877. He has lived in the Colony all of his life and at present lives on his grandfather's (Tom Johnson) homestead, who had come to the Colony in September 1877.²⁷

William Kirtley, an ex-slave, came to the Colony in November 1878. He was born in Henry County, Kentucky, October 20, 1852. He homesteaded 160 acres two miles northeast of what is now Bogue and has lived on the original homestead ever since. William Kirtley, who is now 90 years old, has enjoyed through all of these years the pleasure of owning a home.

In his narration he related vividly the procedure followed to procure his homestead. He went to the Land Office located at Kirwin, Kansas, and secured squatter rights

26. Ibid.

27. Henry Williams, Personal Interview, June 20, 1942.

and pre-emption claim. He lived on the place six months and then homesteaded. He paid a fee of \$2.50 for the quarter of land. Three sod houses were made before he built the frame building in which he now lives. He moved to this place in 1879, homesteaded it in 1881, proved up in 1882 and secured a patent or deed from Washington, D. C., signed by President Grover Cleveland, July 21, 1888.²⁸

It has been said that "A Man's Home is His Castle". Many of these colonists had never owned a home and no doubt felt a glow of pride upon being settled with his family beneath his own roof, even if it was a dirt roof.

But those colonists were to have trials still more severe. There were no industries in the community, no one to employ labor, no chance to get work near home.

Again, there was no land broken out for crops and very few horses with which to till the land. In many cases the garden had to be prepared by spading up the sod in order that vegetables could be planted. The settlers were soon to be located on homestead lands in that neighborhood where most of them constructed sod houses for their homes. In the spring of 1878, three hundred more Negroes from Lexington and Georgetown, Kentucky, arrived.²⁹ It was estimated that there were 600 Negroes in the Colony

28. Patent Record No. 21, County Clerk's Office, Hill City, Graham County, Kansas.

29. The Bogue Messenger, February 25, 1932, Vol. 1, No. 9.

at that time.³⁰

It has been said that the early settlers on the plains of Western Kansas, were visited with all the plagues that were sent against the ancient Egyptians. They had the Indian scare and drought, hot winds and blizzards; and no one who has not been a citizen of the great prairie has any conception of what it meant fifty years and more ago to try to establish a home, engage in successful agricultural pursuits, raise a family and accumulate property during the terrible droughts that occasionally visited that country.³¹

It was no unusual thing for the settlers to put out their corn and spring crops--labor with the same until mid summer and then have the burning heat from Texas and Oklahoma burn it to dry and withered leaves in a day. And that was not all. In those days, there was nothing to break the force of the blizzard of the northwest as it swept from the Dakotas upon the homes and the unprotected livestock of the settlers, until livestock and sometimes human life perished. But that was the test of the pioneer. Those who had the real pioneer spirit, those who were willing to go through privations and hardships of those pioneer days, stuck to their homes; and their children and their children's children are a part of the citizenship of Kansas.³²

30. Kansas State Board of Agriculture, First Biennial Report, Vol. VI, 1877-78, p. 463.

31. The Bogue Messenger, loc. cit.

32. Ibid.

Mrs. Rosa Belle Clark, an ex-slave from Kentucky, who settled in the Nicodemus Colony in 1885, gave her views of the hardships she and her husband endured in rearing a family of nine children. She related how they cried, worked, raised a few chickens and hogs, and farmed on a small scale using hand implements.³³

She related how prairie fires took their toll. A prairie fire broke out on Bow Creek nine miles south of Logan and came down through the Colony burning all the feed, farming implements, and a woman of approximately fifty years of age by the name of Sally Johnson was burned to death.³⁴

Those who were of a faint heart turned their faces away from their lands and their friends and returned to labor for someone else as the chaff was winnowed from the wheat. Some of the great blessings that came to those pioneers were the schools and churches they were permitted to enjoy, and every child enjoyed them.³⁵

Out on those barren prairies, sod churches were constructed. Sunday Schools were established where boys and girls were taught the story of the world's Redeemer. Here was inspired purity of thought and potency of mind where

33. Rosa Belle Clark, Personal Interview, June 20, 1942.

34. Ibid.

35. The Bogue Messenger, February 25, 1932, Vol. 1, No. 9.

those boys and girls, freed from the influence of overseers and owners, took their part in the making of this great state as it mounted the ladder on its path way to the stars.³⁶

The leaders of the colony were religious men,³⁷ and took a deep interest in religion. They established the first church in Graham County on the townsite of Nicodemus in 1885.³⁸

At one time there were three churches in the Nicodemus Colony--the Methodist Episcopal and the First and Second Baptist. Later the two Baptist Churches merged, and today there are two churches in the little village of Nicodemus. They were established in 1885.³⁹

Education has been carried on through the church because of the strong grip of the religious motive on the emotional nature of the Negro. The church is the most powerful institution in Negro life. Good speakers are brought into the churches for the purpose of enlightening and stimulating the colored members. This makes it one of the most important means of educating the colored race as a group and especially those who do not have access to the schools.⁴⁰

36. Ibid., March 3, 1932, Vol. 1, No. 10.

37. Ibid., February 25, 1932, Vol. 1, No. 9.

38. W. L. Sayers, Manuscript: Nicodemus.

39. Henry Williams, Personal Interview, June 20, 1942.

40. Thomas J. Woofter, The Basis of Racial Adjustment.
p. 212.

Mr. W. L. Sayers, in an address before the Men's Day Program held at Nicodemus, Kansas, October 6, 1940, states the following:

Education is knowledge. Knowledge is power, the greatest power on earth and growing stronger every day. But unless a man's life is seasoned by the salt of love and affection and guided and restrained by sincere appreciation of his responsibility to his creator, the educated man is frequently a menace to his country.

In order to control and properly guide the lives of educated men--men of power by reason of their education, it is necessary that there should be a religious background to go along with and to serve as a guide and a restraining influence to properly direct the lives of these men..in other words education does not create honesty, that must come from prior early training, backed up by religious convictions of men's responsibilities to God.⁴¹

Although the early pioneers endured much hardship, they also found time for recreation and social activities. Parties, picnics, entertainments and the annual Emancipation Celebration held at Scrugg's Grove are important social events.

In 1907-08 Nicodemus had one of the best basketball clubs in western Kansas. This colored team traveled over the mid-western part of the State playing at Fairs. Most of the players were boys from Nicodemus. Mr. Jim Merrit, the manager of that team, now lives at Iola, Kansas. His assistant manager, Mr. Andrew Alexander, has resided in the Colony since 1905. Baseball has been the main sport up to the present time.⁴²

41. W. L. Sayers, Manuscript: Men's Day Program Held at Nicodemus, Kansas, October 6, 1940.

42. Andrew Alexander, Personal Interview, June 20, 1942.

POPULATION CHANGES

In Nicodemus Township, Graham County, Kansas

The population figures were taken from the reports of the State Board of Agriculture.⁴³

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>
1877-8	600	1912	401
1880	452	1913	348
1881	287	1914	357
1882	322	1915	299
1883	259	1916	459
1884	239	1917	329
1885	261	1918	218
1886	333	1919	244
1887	397	1920	244
1888	407	1921	279
1889	387	1922	288
1890	317	1923	285
1891	284	1924	298
1892	302	1925	267
1893	328	1926	291
1894	322	1927	232
1895	307	1928	305
1896	313	1929	290
1897	322	1930	296
1898	309	1931	321
1899	297	1932	326
1900	304	1933	335
1901	332	1934	344
1902	366	1935	321
1903	343	1936	308
1904	375	1937	293
1905	360	1938	244
1906	417	1939	262
1907	501	1940	249
1908	383	1941	235
1909	371	1942	226
1910	409	1943	222
1911	361		

⁴³. Kansas State Board of Agriculture, Biennial Reports, 1877-1940, Vol. VI-XXXVII. Population for 1941-43 from Census Reports, Graham County Clerk.

CHAPTER III

PERIOD OF DECLINE OF NICODEMUS

The colonists looked for an extension of the Missouri Pacific from Stockton, and had hopes of securing the Union Pacific. News of the coming events started a boom in the Colony. New store buildings, hotels, and new residences were erected. Nicodemus was a thriving little village of several hundred inhabitants and boasted two drug stores, three grocery stores, bank, hotel, two newspapers, and other business enterprises.

The Missouri Pacific never came, however, and their hearts sank. In 1888, with the coming of the Union Pacific several miles to the South, the town began to decrease in size. With no hopes of ever being more than an inland town, the village began to dwindle and it has been on the decline ever since. In a few years her business houses moved to towns having a railroad.

Crop failures, drought, dust storms, lack of work and lack of money were other causes for the decline.¹

In 1901 the country began to prosper, farmers began making some money, the sod homes gave way to frame and stone, and some of them went to raising hogs and cattle.

1. Mr. and Mrs. George Moore, Personal Interview, June 13, 1942.

But Nicodemus, the village, never came up again.²

It seems marvelous that this colony should have stayed while men came and settled all around them, held their claims until they could prove up, then mortgaged them for what they could get and left the country. The negroes stayed and are here yet, and while they are not all wealthy, they have homes.³

The town of Nicodemus now is nothing more than a deserted village, containing one school house, two fairly good country churches and fourteen or fifteen residences. It was once a rather prosperous little town, but that was before the day of railroads, when merchants brought in their wares by freight hauling--that is, by wagons. There is no railroad connection with Nicodemus.⁴

Today there is not a store, buildings are dilapidated, and the once thriving little village has a population of approximately sixty people.

Education in the Colony

The first school district in Graham County was organized June 19, 1879, at Nicodemus, and on July 13 of that year the following officers were elected: Director, Z. T. Fletcher; Clerk, Clark Samuels; Treasurer, Jefferson

2. The Topeka State Journal, January 7, 1922.

3. The Kansas City Star, January 26, 1905, p. 3.

4. W. L. Sayers, Manuscript, March 14, 1937.

Lindsley.⁵ Nicodemus school district is numbered one because it was the first. At the present time there are three other school districts in the colony.

In 1878 there were six schools in the Nicodemus Colony, all kept in dugouts.⁶ The Negro slaves, who founded the Colony, were very poorly educated. Many of them had had only two or three months of school in Kentucky; others had never attended school. The school in Nicodemus was held in the First Baptist Church for a while, with Mrs. Case, a white woman, as teacher. The school terms varied in length from three months to six months. There were few school books in those days, yet all school children were given the opportunity to learn the three R's.⁷

The first school law passed by the first Territorial Legislature on August 30, 1855, excluded the few Negro children, because Kansas at that time was generally controlled by the pro-slavery men, who were against educating the Negro.⁸

In the year of 1858, a law was passed whereby Negro children could attend the schools. It was stated as follows:

All school districts established under the authority of this act shall be free and without charge for tuition to all children between the age of five and twenty-one years, and no sectarian instructions shall be allowed therein.⁹

5. Graham County Superintendent. Record, School District Boundaries and Officers, Hill City, Graham County, Kansas, 1879. p. 101, 104.

6. Kansas State Board of Agriculture, First Biennial Report, Vol. VI, p. 378.

7. Henry Williams, Personal Interview, June 20, 1942.

8. Blackmar, Cyclopedia of Kansas History, p. 564.

9. Andreas, History of Kansas, p. 266.

In 1874, a law was passed in Kansas for compulsory education. It was then the duty of every parent or guardian, having control of any child or children between the ages of six and sixteen, to send them to public or private school, taught by a competent instructor, for a period of at least twelve weeks of each year, six weeks of which time should be consecutive, unless they were excused from such attendance by the board of education.¹⁰ This school law, although not enforced to a great extent, was important as it caused more attendance of Negro children. It also caused the building of rural schools.

Some of the pioneer colored teachers of the Colony were J. E. Porter, who taught at District #1, from October 31, 1887, to February 7, 1888--a three months term at \$40 per month; Mary Moore also taught at District #1, receiving a salary of \$25 per month; W. L. Sayers, one of the leading colored attorneys in Kansas at the present time, taught seven terms in the Colony. He taught a regular three months term at District #1, Nicodemus, the term beginning December 11, 1888, and ending March 11, 1889. Remuneration for his services was \$30 per month.¹¹

The reason for school's beginning so late in the

10. Blackmar, Cyclopedia of Kansas History, p. 564.

11. Record, School District Officers and Teachers Employed, Graham County, Hill City, Kansas. 1879.

fall or winter was to give the farmer boys and girls an opportunity to do their farm work. W. L. Sayers, who taught at District #1, also taught school at Districts #57, 26, and 13.¹²

From the four elementary school districts located in the Colony of Nicodemus--approximately eighty (80) students have graduated.¹³ Many of these eighth grade graduates have enrolled at Bogue Rural High School, Bogue, Kansas. Thirty-nine (39) colored students have graduated from Bogue Rural High School since 1920.¹⁴

One of these thirty-nine graduates of Bogue Rural High School, Mr. Gilbert Alexander, has graduated from the Kansas University at Lawrence, Kansas.

The town of Nicodemus and all of Nicodemus Township is within the limits of Rural High School District #2, which is located at Bogue, Kansas. From the time of its organization in 1920 until the year 1936, the Clerk of said rural high school district was G. M. Sayers, a colored man.¹⁵

The colored children and the white children have the same legal rights in the schools of Kansas.

12. W. L. Sayers, Personal Interview, June 5, 1943.

13. Graduates Record. Hester Gordon, Graham County Superintendent, Hill City, Kansas, June 5, 1943.

14. Permanent Records. Bogue Rural High School District No. 2, Bogue, Kansas. May 14, 1943. William J. Belleau, Principal.

15. W. L. Sayers, Manuscript: March 14, 1937.

CHAPTER IV

CONTEMPORARY LIFE OF THE NEGRO

Economic and Industrial Status

The economic status of the Negro in the Nicodemus Colony is much more stable now than it was in former years. The stability is caused by more Negroes having permanent homes, steady jobs, and better education. The Negroes are learning to adjust themselves to their economic needs but they still have a long way to progress before their economic position will be secure.

Negroes of the Colony live nearer the margin of economic insecurity than the white man, consequently fluctuations in employment and wages affect him more readily and more severely than they do the white man.

No statistics are available as to the number of Negroes who have bank accounts--but in talking with colored people, one finds that a very small per cent put money in the banks. This may be accounted for in three ways. The first reason is that the average colored person lives a "happy-go-lucky" type of life. As long as he has a dollar he is willing to spend it and let tomorrow take care of itself. The second reason is that very few of the colored people hold positions which pay enough wages for them to ~~save~~ large amounts of money.¹

1. Personal interviews with W. L. Sayers, George Moore, Wm. Kirtley, and Henry Williams, June 20, 1942.

The third reason is the fact that it has been and is at the present time very difficult for the Negro to secure employment even at common labor.

The economic status of the Negro affects the other sides of his life. Much of the Negro's low educational standard can be traced to his unstable economic position. He is unable to pay for education and for that reason, large numbers of colored children stay out of school in order to work for a living.²

One of the first sources of income in the Colony was the sale of "buffalo" bones picked up on the prairie.³

Nicodemus is a settlement of farm owners, hard hit by the depression and droughts of recent years but still fighting their way. Farming and stock-raising are the basic occupations of the colony.

A. G. Alexander, who died recently was the most prominent farmer and the most successful farmer that was produced by that community.

There never was any industry in Nicodemus. The only professional men produced by that community are three lawyers--W. L. Sayers, John Q. Sayers, brothers, and Wendell P. Sayers, son of W. L. Sayers. They reside in Hill City, Kansas.⁴

2. Ibid., Personal Interviews.

3. The Kansas City Star, January 26, 1905, p. 3.

4. W. L. Sayers, Manuscript: March 14, 1937.

The Federal Government is helping the Negro farmers to meet the adverse conditions which they have had to face in recent years. The government is loaning the colored farmers money the same as it is doing for the white farmers. The Federal Land Bank at Wichita has made many loans to colored farm operators.

In addition to the farm loans, Social Security and old age benefits have accrued to those eligible for such help. Mr. and Mrs. George Moore, ex-slaves from Kentucky and pioneers of Nicodemus Colony are receiving \$30 per month in old age pensions and have received this amount since the passage of the law.⁵

Political Status

The laws of the United States and the laws of Kansas give the Negro and the white man the same political rights in Kansas. The Fourteenth Amendment to the constitution of the United States made the Negro a citizen, while the Fifteenth Amendment gave him the right to vote. No legal discrimination can be made against the Negro regarding his position in the political life of Kansas. He has the right to vote, hold office, and take part in political questions of all types.⁶

5. Personal interviews with George Moore and Henry Williams, June 20, 1942.

6. Shepherd, The Educational Status of the Negro in Kansas. A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, May, 1934, p. 76.

The organization of Graham County was effected on April 1, 1880. The appointed officers were: Clerk, E. P. McCabe, a colored man; Commissioners, E. C. Moses and O. G. Nevins.⁷ At that time the colored population of the new county was relatively large. The records show that the first election held within the new county (in other words the first Graham County election) was held in Nicodemus,⁸ on June 1, 1880.⁹

E. P. McCabe, then a young man, had been attracted to the West from his home in Chicago. Abram T. Hall, another educated man, came from the same place to the same destination. These two young men, both colored, were very active in the early history of the Nicodemus Colony. The latter engaged in the real estate business, while the former's field of activity was in politics. Small wonder that in November 8, 1881,¹⁰ E. P. McCabe was elected to the office of County Clerk. He resigned from this position to become State Auditor of Kansas. He served four years beginning July 1, 1882, to June 30, 1886.¹¹

Mr. McCabe, a colored man, enjoyed the distinction of being the first and only representative of his race elected to a State office in a Northern State. That he did not disappoint his friends, is evidenced by his re-election

7. Blackmar, Cyclopedia of Kansas History, Vol. 1, p. 770.

8. W. L. Sayers, Manuscript: January 14, 1936.

9. Blackmar, loc. cit.

10. Graham County. Commissioner's Journal, Docket 1, p.76.

11. State Auditor's Report, Topeka, Kansas, 1882, 1886.

two years later.¹² He was the first Graham County citizen to serve in a state office.

It was Abram T. Hall, Sr., of Nicodemus, who took the Census necessary to effect the organization of Graham County.¹³ The following colored people have also served, with credit to themselves and their race, as county officials of Graham County: John Deprad, first County Clerk, was elected June 1, 1880; in 1886, John R. Hawkins of Nicodemus was elected to the office of Clerk of District Court --serving four years from January 1, 1887, to January 1, 1891. He was succeeded by J. E. Porter, who held the office until January 1895. Mr. Porter was succeeded by W. L. Sayers, who held the office from January 1895 to January 1900, having fallen heir to one additional year by reason of the fact that his successor died after being elected and before qualifying for the office.

The office of County Attorney was held by the following named colored men: George W. Jones from January 1897 to January 1901. W. L. Sayers from January 1901 to January 1903. Also from January 1913 to January 1917. John Q. Sayers from January 1919 to January 1921.¹⁴

Lewis Welton and Daniel Hickman have served the

12. Clara H. Hazelrigg, History of Kansas, p. 202.

13. W. L. Sayers, Manuscript, 1942.

14. W. L. Sayers, Manuscript: January 6, 1937.

County as commissioners. The township of Nicodemus, in which the town of Nicodemus is located, has been under the management of colored officials ever since the organization of the county.

W. L. Sayers served as County Agent under the Draft Board during the World War and has served as Chairman of the Home Service Department of the American Red Cross of Graham County since its organization in connection with the World War.

W. L. Sayers and his son, Wendell P. Sayers, are now engaged in the law practice in Hill City, Graham County, Kansas. John Q. Sayers is engaged in law and abstracting of titles.¹⁵

A post office was established in 1878 at Nicodemus with Z. T. Fletcher as postmaster.¹⁶ Nicodemus was granted a post office on a star route, but the mail carrier's pay was so small that sometimes no one would take the job for a while, and then Fletcher would walk over to Ellis occasionally and carry the mail on his back.¹⁷

Before closing this chapter, one should not forget the great part played by the women in the founding of the Nicodemus Colony. They, too, deserve much credit as the

15. Ibid., January 6, 1937.

16. Blackmar, *Cyclopedia of Kansas History*, Vol. 1, p. 770.

17. The Kansas City Star, January 26, 1905.

Black Pioneers of the West. What a task they had to perform and how well they performed it.

Deprived of the ordinary comforts of life, it was their part to remain at home and care for the children and in many cases to do hard farm work in the fields while their husbands sought employment at a distance to provide food for the family.

Sixty-five years of time has greatly reduced their numbers. The settlement has lost some of its political importance because of decrease of its population and corresponding increase of the white population in Graham County, but Nicodemus settlement is still intact, with its own schools and school officers, its own township and township officers, and its own farmers and farm owners.

It has had its internal dissensions, but, on the whole, it has been able to present a united and solid front against encroachment from without. Like the early Pilgrims who settled America, that colony has done its part in shaping the destiny of humanity.¹⁸

Then here's to the Black Pioneers! It is a long way from the cabins of the southlands whence they came to the splendid farms and homes on the prairies of Western Kansas. It is a long way from the institution of physical slavery in the South to active participation in the civic

18. The Bogue Messenger, March 3, 1932. Vol. 1, No. 10.

life of a great state.

We know that the memory of those Black Pioneers will always live and be kept fresh in the hearts of the Black Race.¹⁹

Nicodemus is almost a forgotten village, but it has played its part in the making of western Kansas history. Although the few remaining landmarks represent a faded glory, the name of the little village will ever remain near and dear to the hearts of the colored race who came from the plantations of the South out to these barren prairies, and like the white settlers of those pioneer days they have no other desire than for their homes to repose in the soil of the land they reclaimed.

In this little spot in Graham County, a chapter in history has been written and the few remaining stone buildings stand as a monument and a tribute to the colored race who dared to brave the hazards of pioneer days on the prairies.²⁰

19. The Bogue Messenger, Bogue, Kansas, March 3, 1932, Vol. 1, No. 10.

20. The Rooks County Record, Stockton, Kansas, March 29, 1934.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The materials of this thesis portray the settlement, development, and decline of the Nicodemus Colony of Graham County, Kansas. Conclusions formulated from analysis of material presented in the body of thesis warrants the following:

1. The pioneers were sturdy, courageous, common and friendly. These characteristics were developed during the period of colonization as they were essential for survival.
2. They endured the hardships of pioneer life in order to secure homes for their loved ones, and to gain more individual freedom. As pointed out in chapter two, after going through the hardships incident to that period of time, many Negroes succeeded in proving up and getting title to their lands.
3. The settlement of Nicodemus has lost some of its political importance because of decrease of its population as is shown in the table of population on page 20.
4. The Nicodemus township is still intact with its own officers as it has been since organization in 1877.
5. Farming was the chief occupation of the settlers of the colony and still is.
6. However, today Nicodemus is a deserted village,

but it has played its part in the making of western Kansas history.

7. Education has played an important part in the life of the colony and has helped to obliterate illiteracy. As pointed out in chapter two, the slaves had had no opportunity to become educated and as a result, illiteracy was wide spread. However, at the present time, approximately fifty per cent of Negro eighth grade graduates complete their high school education. This fact is shown by statistics on page 25.

8. With the decrease in Negro illiteracy, the Negro's social status has been improved.

9. The economic status of the Negro in Nicodemus Colony has been greatly improved in recent years; hence, he lives a more stable life. He is not living as near the economic margin as he has in the past.

The values derived in this study are as follows:

1. The thesis should be of value to teachers of the elementary and high school level, in the teaching of sociology, geography, and history. It should be of value not only to teachers of Graham County but of other states as well.

2. The thesis does bring together in compact form much information of a reliable nature otherwise found in scattered periodicals, newspapers, and public records.

3. Preservation in written form of the settlement, development, decline of Nicodemus Colony is worthy of being preserved as a contribution to the historic record of Western Kansas, and finally to aid in a better understanding of problems pertaining to the contact of one race with another, and the part which education plays in refining these relationships.

Finally, it has occurred to the author that certain difficulties and problems identified with developing a thesis of similar nature should be pointed out.

Have the personal interviews as soon as the thesis problem has been chosen--since, as pointed out in the first chapter, one of the limitations of a study of this kind is the forgetfulness due to the age of persons interviewed now living in relation to events which transpired sixty or more years ago.

Individuals will sometimes like to put in personal elements to color the story. These must be sifted out.

If possible, one should interview persons who have had formal training. That is one of the limitations of this thesis, as several of the persons interviewed have never had the opportunity to secure an education.

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The Clark family came to the Nicodemus Colony in 1885. Very helpful in supplying information of pioneer life.

Kirtley, William. Bogue, Kansas, June 20, 1942.

One of the ex-slaves of New Castle, Henry County, Kentucky, who homesteaded in Graham County in 1879. Told of hardships endured by the colonists.

Moore, Mr. and Mrs. George. Nicodemus, Kansas, June 20, 1942.

Ex-slaves of Georgetown, Scott County, Kentucky, who settled at Nicodemus in 1878-79. Has a good memory of pioneer days, and furnished much information.

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Gave valuable information about the education and schools of the Colony.

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MAP SUPPLEMENT



TOWNS

1. Blaine
2. Pogue
3. Hill City
4. Millbrook
5. Pogue
6. Brant
7. St. Peter

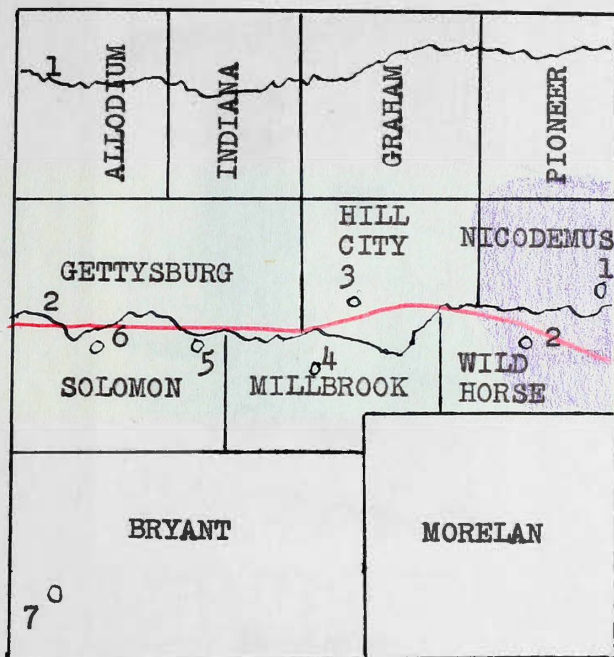
Red line--Union Pacific Railroad

Black lines--1. Bow Creek

2. Salmon River

Shaded portion--Blaine County

MAP OF GRAHAM COUNTY



TOWNS

1. Nicodemus
2. Bogue
3. Hill City
4. Millbrook
5. Penokee
6. Morland
7. St. Peter

Red line--Union Pacific Railroad

Black lines--1. Bow Creek

2. Solomon River

Shaded portion--Nicodemus Colony



Ex-slaves

Mr. George Moore, Age 88

Mrs. George Moore, Age 90

**They came from Georgetown, Scott County,
Kentucky. They settled at Nicodemus in 1878-79.**



Ex-slave

William Kirtley, Age 90

Mr. William Kirtley came to Nicodemus in the second colony. He came from New Castle, Henry County, Kentucky. He still lives on the original homestead.



Ex-slave

Mrs. Rosa Belle Clark, Age 84

Mrs. Clark was one of the pioneers of Nicodemus Colony. The Clark family came to Nicodemus in 1885.



Henry Williams, Age 65

The first colored child born in Graham County, Kansas. He was born on October 30, 1877, at Nicodemus. His parents came in the second colony in September 1877.



G. M. Sayers and Wife
and four of their older children

Mr. George M. Sayers, brother of John Q. and W. L. Sayers, was one of the early postmasters of Nicodemus Colony. He taught eight terms of school in Nicodemus Colony. His work as postmaster began in the spring of 1896 and he has served for a period of twenty-seven years. His wife served as his assistant in this office until her death in 1934. He was born October 20, 1868.



W. L. Sayers

Born on a farm in Richardson County, Nebraska, February 3, 1872. Came to Graham County in 1887, to Hill City in 1894. Was a pioneer school teacher of Nicodemus Colony. Admitted to the bar in 1898. Elected Clerk of District Court in 1894 and served five years. Elected County Attorney in 1900, served two years; elected County Attorney in 1912 and served four years. At present practicing law in Hill City with his son, Wendell P. Sayers.



Abram Thomson Hall, Age 92

He was born April 25, 1851, in the City of Chicago, Illinois, the son of Rev. A. T. and Mrs. Joanna Hall. Mr. Hall was appointed by Governor Anthony as first Census Taker for Graham County.

BIOGRAPHY OF ABRAM THOMSON HALL, SR.

Abram Thomson Hall II was born April 25th, 1851, in the City of Chicago, Illinois, the son of Rev. A. T. and Mrs. Joanna Hall. He was educated in the public schools of that city, in Batavia, Ill., and studied one year at the college of Physicians and Surgeons, Indianapolis, Ind. He was a sailor three years on the Great Lakes, plying between Buffalo, N. Y., Duluth, Minn., and Chicago. Was a reporter two years on the Indianapolis Herald and the Indianapolis Sentinel, thence to St. Paul, Minn. as City Editor of the Western Appeal; thence to Chicago as City Editor of The Conservator, and as a columnist on the Memphis Tenn. Planet, and Detroit, Mich., Plaindealer. Was later a clerk on the Fast Mail Set in the main post office there, and served one term as a Collector of taxes for the South Town.

In April 1878, went to Leavenworth, Kansas, met and signed up with John W. Niles, an agent of the Nicodemus Colony, along with Edwin P. McCabe. Shortly after our arrival in Graham County, we--Hall & McCabe--began locating and surveying U. S. Government public lands, in that and adjoining counties, running lines and filing claims for upward of 2,000 persons while so engaged. Graham County was then unorganized, and Mr. Hall was appointed a deputy clerk of Rooks County, for Graham County, the first officer of

record for that county. Later the county was organized as a Township of Rooks County, with Nicodemus as the Township seat, and Granville Lewis as Justice of the Peace, and Charles Page as Constable. When a county organization was proposed, Governor Anthony appointed Mr. Hall census taker to find out its population and taxable resources.

There was a population in excess of 5000 and ample resources and improvements to warrant organization. Which was ratified by an election, Millbrook being designated the County Seat. In this movement, the names of Messrs. W. Terrell and Fountain of Millbrook, Lou Ellsworth and Asa Jones of Gettysburg, Tom McGill, Thos. Beaumont and Rev. Dan Hickman of Hill City, Isaac Flynn of Roscoe and Messrs. McCabe, Fletcher, Vaughn, Dorsey, Bradford, Smith, Garland, Page and Lewis, recur. Mr. McCabe was elected the first county clerk, and Mr. Hall official road viewer.

In October 1880, I relinquished my holdings to Mr. McCabe, and returned east to Mo. where I was City Editor of The Tribune until the fall of 1881, thence City Editor of The Advocate until Sept. 1889. Married Miss Mary Lee Robinson, at Pittsburgh, Pa., Sept. 1883. After 6 years residence in Chicago, moved to Pittsburgh, where I have since resided.

Issue of marriage--4 boys, 4 girls. Wife died 1920. Re-married a Mrs. Louise Chaplin Kerr, at Buffalo, N. Y., 1924. No issue.

Was Columnist on the Pittsburgh Sunday Press 31 years. Counter Clerk City Treasurer's Office 43 years. Active in civic, social and fraternal affairs all my life. Retired from all active participation in public affairs 1938.

With an itch for writing, have had many poems published in magazines, newspapers and anthologies in various parts of the country, and many short stories.

In Life's evening, have a rich fund of memories to draw upon, health excellent, appetite as of yore, sleep like a babe. Lively interest in current events and glad I am alive.

(Signed) Abram T. Hall, Sr.

A LETTER WRITTEN BY MR. ABRAM T. HALL, SR.

(On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the town of Nicodemus.)

September 6th, 1937
Pittsburg, Pa.
829 Bryn Mawr Rd.

Mrs. Kathyrne Henri
Bogue, Kansas.

My Dear Madam:

I have learned through you, that our group of people who are resident in Graham County, Ks. plan to celebrate-- on Friday Sept. 16th the sixtieth (60) anniversary of the founding of the town of Nicodemus, on its present site,-- not far from the Western line of Rooks County.

The original company, so I have been led to believe, numbered a total of two hundred and sixty seven (267) men, women and children. I was not one of them, in fact I was unaware of the colony project, until early in April, 1878, but it was by the merest chance--an overheard conversation in a Leavenworth boarding house dining room, that I was diverted from going to Hodgeman County, to which I was found, but to this day I have never proceeded.

It all came about this way, I had arrived in Leavenworth that morning in April from Chicago, intending to proceed to Hodgeman County, Kansas, where a colony of our group of people had recently established a settlement, into which I purposed to cast my lot, and become a part of it. I was wholly unacquainted with any of the Hodgeman County Colonists, all that I knew concerning them I had gleaned in my capacity as City Editor of The Conservator, a race newspaper, then published, weekly, in Chicago. Mr. Edward Preston McCabe had joined in on the colony plan, but I preceeded him west several days. This overheard conversation which switched me from Hodgeman to Graham County, was to this effect: Three (3) ladies seated at a dining table, at the far-side from one occupied by a friend and myself, were discussing a mass-meeting to be held that night, in an A. M. E. Church directly across the street, at which the final disposition of quite a lot of relief supplies, donated for some Colored Colonists in Graham County, would be made, but which had been held up by a trio of Colored local politicians each one of whom claimed the credit for raising the

supplies. That was the very first word I had heard of Graham County and its Negro Colonists, but my instinct as a newspaper man prompted me to unearth Mr. John W. Niles the Colony Agent, learn from him their story up to then and to proffer him any service I could perform, then and there in securing the custody of the supplies; and starting them out to his needy people. This was successfully accomplished at the Mass-Meeting that night, and the Colony agent--Mr. Niles was so well-pleased with the assistance I had rendered him, that, right off the bat, he made me a proposition to join in with his colony, and help him, and its other officials make it a success. I accepted his offer, both for myself and Mr. McCabe, who arrived at Leavenworth several days later, and ratified my acceptance. Boarding the Denver Express of the Missouri Pacific, (*) we--Mr. Niles, Mr. McCabe and myself made the trip west to Ellis, where we arrived about 2:30 A.M. where we were put up by Mr. and Mrs. Phillip Hayden. The next morning a delegation of the Colonists--Messrs. Henry Smith, Grant Harris, Charles Page, and John DePrad, reported to Mr. Niles their arrival from the colony, with three (3) teams and wagons, secured from the Bow Creek settlement, to transport the relief supplies across country--35 miles to Nicodemus. The wagons were loaded speedily and we were not long in getting started on our trek for the South fork of the Solomon River--our journey's end. By noon we had crossed the Saline River, where we stopped to rest the team horses, and refresh ourselves. It had been agreed that our night camp should be pitched at Happy Hollow, about half way of the remaining distance to be traversed.

As the wagons were pulling away from our noon resting place, I noticed the absence of a green baize bag, which I had placed a top the load of one of them, in which were all my earthly belongings except what I then wore; and Grant Harris volunteered to hike back along the faint trail we had made, and recover it: the rest of the party to proceed on to Happy Hollow where in event of our--Harris and I, not overtaking them by dark, they were to ignite a big bonfire which would guide us to them. We found the green baize bag lying alongside the trail our wagons had made, back about two (2) miles, undisturbed since it had toppled off the wagon unobserved by any of our party. Then we two started to retrace our steps and rejoin the wagon train. Here's where I was given my first lesson in pioneering. Becoming very thirsty I longed for a drink of water, cool or otherwise, and I spoke of my desire to Harris, my companion, who looked about him for a minute then stooped and pulled, what looked to me as a bit of ordinary prairie grass, which he handed to me, with the remark "Put that in your mouth, and chew it and swallow the saliva." Following his instructions,

my thirst soon ceased,- Upon inquiry I learned what he had handed me was Wild Garlic, and the knowledge of its thirst quenching properties stood me in good stead on several other occasions. There was no settlement, at that time anywhere in sight, from Ellis to Nicodemus, not even a cowboy hove in view, although hordes of cattle were to be seen grazing in the offing especially on the divide between the Saline and Solomon Rivers.

The sparseness of fuel timber was quite noticeable along the route and while I had seen the men of our party--not including McCabe and myself, picking up sun-dried cow droppings, whenever they saw any, and chucking them into the feed box at the end of the nearest wagon, Neither McCabe nor myself had the remotest idea what it was all about, until the wagons arrived at Happy Hollow, and while some of us were fixing the tarpaulins about the wagon wheels, on the windward side, and spreading blankets on the ground underneath the wagons for a sleeping place, others got busy preparing the evening's meal. There was soon a big blaze of "Cow Chips" on which the cooking was done; and right there and then Mr. McCabe who had been telling everybody how hungry and famished he was, lost his appetite. The nearness of "Cow Chips" to the food was too much for his aesthetic appetite and "city raised" stomach, and while the rest of the party gorged ourselves, he starved in silence; but he later became an adept "Cow Chip" cook himself.

Setting out early the next morning we were abreast the school mound just across the Rooks County line, about eight (8) miles south by east of the river crossing into "demus". Someone informed Mc and I that we could see Nicodemus from atop of it, and, as Moses had to climb Mount Sinia to view the promised land, so up the steep grade we clambered to the level, where we encountered our first two (2) rattlesnakes sunning themselves, both of which we killed with stones--and our boots. Then Mr. Niles bade us look to the North, in the direction he was pointing, just beyond a fringe of trees, where we'd see some black spots. That was "Nicodemus". I confess to feeling disappointed. I had never seen a "Dug-lur" nor a "Sod-up" and I had not the least conception of how either of them looked. Eventually we made the afterward familiar crossing and, with many of the colonists escorting the well-loaded wagons, we came to a halt--not far from Rev. Andersons Stone-Up.

We were in "demus", and while I busied myself preparing a paper authorizing Mr. Niles to solicit aid to be signed by those who favored his services and who alone would share in their division, the teamsters were paid out of the

supplies, and they were stored in the Charles Williams stone-front dug out, along the Stockton Trail. I was assigned to the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Scott, and Mr. McCabe to the Buckner's, both of whom had homes along the Main Street opposite the post-office, and Fletcher's General--generally out of everything store. I would like to learn the names given to that historic corner, where Green's store adorned the northeast point, the Post-Office and Fletcher's Emporium--the southeast point, Wilson's Store, at the northwest point, and the "Land Office, at the southwest point, with the well box adorning the center. From that day things began to be busy for me and for Demus, and life is too short to tell it all in one letter. As I bring this to a close, I am wondering would I be a stranger in a strange land, were I to drop down out of a plane unannounced in one of your parks or would a cordon of the "Old Guard" be there to escort me to your leading hotel--or to the city Jail?

I hope everybody, young and old will have a real, good, Aunt Dolly's time at the celebration, where I shall be present in mind, if not in person.

Regards to everybody,

Abram T. Hall, Sr.



Grade School Building

District No. 1

The first school district in Graham County
was organized at Nicodemus on June 19, 1879.



Baptist Church
of
Nicodemus, Kansas



A. M. E. Church

The first church in Graham County
was established at Nicodemus Colony in 1885.



Store Building

This is what remains of one of
Nicodemus' fine buildings erected in 1880.



Store Building

The above building was used as a general merchandise store and postoffice for many years.



One of the pioneer homes of Nicodemus
which is in use today.



Township Hall

The Nicodemus Township Hall was a building sponsored by Nicodemus Township, and constructed with the assistance of W. P. A.

Speech Delivered on the Occasion of the
OPENING OF THE NICODEMUS TOWNSHIP HALL

by

W. L. Sayers, Hill City Attorney

Master of Ceremonies, Board of Trustees of
Nicodemus Township, Honorable Guests, Ladies
and Gentlemen:

This is a great day for Nicodemus. We meet here to celebrate the opening of the Township Hall of Nicodemus Township, a building sponsored by Nicodemus Township, constructed with the assistance of W.P.A. and planned and supervised by Alex Alexander, Pearl Bates and Ace Williams, three men of our Race who happened to be the choice of the voters in the Township election of 1938. We may well be proud of this magnificent building, and I hope and believe that in constructing this building we have set the standard high and that it will have the effect of producing and developing a feeling of community interest and I may say community pride--in other words that it may produce within us a feeling that when away from home we will be glad to hold our heads high and say I am from Nicodemus.

It is my earnest hope that by means of this building and the improved conduct we shall have in civic affairs here, we may be able to inspire in the hearts of our young people a greater love for their native community. During the years that have gone by the voters of this community have

been especially loyal in the support of Colored men for public office. Even before this County was organized, this little community gave its moral support to the appointment of Abram T. Hall as the first Census taker who took the census for the establishment of Graham County. Later, this community gave its support to John Niles for County Clerk, to John DePrad for County Clerk, to E. P. McCabe for County Clerk and for State Auditor of Kansas, to Dan Hickman for County Commissioner, to Louis Welton for County Commissioner, to John R. Hawkins for Clerk of District Court, to J. E. Porter for Clerk of District Court, G. W. Jones for County Attorney, to John Q. Sayers for County Attorney, and to W. L. Sayers for Clerk of District Court and for County Attorney. You have not shown yourselves to be selfish or narrow-minded but on the other hand you have shown the ability to lay aside party differences and give your support where you believed it would do the most for the Race.

But, a considerable number, in fact a big per cent of those you elevated to office, did not remain with you or bring back to you the benefit of their experience from having been elevated to office. I have lived in your county more than 53 years, but I have never seen McCabe, your County Clerk, your State Auditor. When I came to the County, he was probably just about completing his second term as Auditor of the State of Kansas, but he didn't come back out West, he went to Oklahoma. I am told that he later died in

Chicago, Illinois, almost unknown--whereas if he had returned to Western Kansas where he was known and respected, he would no doubt have had a brilliant career. J. E. Porter a very brilliant man whom most of you remember, never came back to practice medicine in Graham County. He was enabled to complete his education as a doctor by reason of his salary as Clerk of the District Court. In fact, his wife ran the office during the last two years of his incumbency so as to keep him in money for school. He was a brilliant man, a fine man. But things looked more enticing somewhere else. Porter didn't come back. Porter would have been a wonderful help to the Colored people of Graham County, if only we hadn't lost him.

In other words, we have been letting too many of our brightest men get away from us and go to other communities. Now we are taking a step to try to set a standard in our home community so progressive that those who go away to college will be pleased to come back and settle right here at home because of their pride for their home community of Nicodemus. We already have our local Choir and our local Choruses and I am looking forward to the time when we shall have here at Nicodemus a well-organized, well-equipped and well-trained Brass Band. We are too far from Denver, Salina, Great Bend to have to drive off to those places for our social activities. When we get there we find that our home talent is equal to or superior to what they have there.

With this Hall as a nucleus to gether around, we shall be able to put on in a creditable way any class of entertainment suitable to the community. We shall be able to attract the best elements of other communities so that they will come to us instead of our losing our best to them.



Nicodemus Township Hall

1939

LETTER FROM WENDELL P. SAYERS CONTAINING
ARTICLES FROM VOLUME 1, NO. 1, OF THE "WESTERN CYCLONE"
ONE OF NICODEMUS' FIRST NEWSPAPERS. Date: Thurs-
day, May 13, 1886

1125 Lincoln Street
Topeka, Kansas

April 7, 1933

Mrs. Lulu Craig,
Manzanola, Colorado.

Dear Madam:-

At father's request, I send herewith the names of the newspapers edited in Nicodemus. I notice that he suggests the name of Nicodemus Advocate, but no such paper is registered with the Historical Society.

The information I have is as follows:-

Arthur G. Thurman began on May 13th, 1886 to edit the "Western Cyclone." Thurman continued as editor until July 29th, 1886, at which time H. K. Lightfoot became editor and he served until May 12, 1887. Geo. A. Sandford became editor beginning with the issue of May 12, 1887, and remained so until Nov. 25, 1887, at which time M. C. Inlow became the editor. By December 30, 1887, Inlow had changed the name of the paper from the "Western Cyclone" to "The Nicodemus Cyclone", at which time Porter and Inlow were editors and proprietors. The paper continued until in the late fall of 1888, but I do not seem to have recorded the date of the final issue.

The Nicodemus Enterprise, a short-lived paper, was first issued August 17, 1887 and continued only until Dec. 23 of that year. H. K. Lightfoot was the editor. The issue of October 26, 1887 bears the names of Lightfoot and Henrie as publishers and editors, and the final issue recorded, bears the date of December 23, 1887.

The attendant of the library told me that in those early days editors were not prompt in sending in copies of their paper and it might be that other papers were published

which never reached the historical society.

I copied the following editorial note from Vol. 1, No. 1 of the "Western Cyclone":

"Nicodemus has no whiskey shop; no billiard hall or other gambling hole; its citizens are a moral, refined people; no drunkenness or rowdyism, no cursing or whooping disturbs the peace of the place. Its example is worthy the attention of its sister towns."

I also found the following article:- Vol. 1, No. 1

"Nicodemus. The following is a synopsis of the various branches of business carried on in our town.

S. G. Wilson, came here in 1879, from the state of Massachusetts and branched out in the mercantile business and has been doing well ever since. In 1885 he was the choice of the Republican county convention of Graham County for the office of County Treasurer, and was triumphantly elected to that office in November of the same year. S.G. Wilson's name is a household word in the entire county; having stood by the people in their hours of want, well does he deserve the respect he now commands.

C. H. Newth, located in the town in 1884, having bought the property from a Mr. Green. Mr. Newth keeps a good stock of dry goods and groceries in connection with his drug store. Here you can find a good supply of drugs, medicines, groceries, etc. C.H. is also an M.D., and has a very extensive practice. An Englishman by birth and an American by adoption; he came to Rooks County in 1879 and settled on a homestead three miles from this town. In 1879 he was married to Miss Woodard, daughter of A. Woodard of Roscoe. Newth had built a house and opened a drug store in 1879; he moved and returned in 1884.

B. P. Moreland:- The "old reliable" harness maker came into Graham County in 1884. He started a harness shop in Nicodemus last fall (1885). Mr. Moreland is a first class workman and is meeting with the success he deserves.

Z. T. Fletcher & Bro.:- Among the first emigrants into Graham County was Z. T. Fletcher and family who came here in 1877. He was Cor. Sec. of the colony organization from its first inception to its disbandment. In 1880 he was appointed by Pres. Arthur as postmaster at Nicodemus, a

position he filled creditably and without interruption to the present (1886).

Z.T. and Thomas Fletcher are proprietors of the St. Francis Hotel, the only hotel in the city and one that has an excellent reputation for its good accommodations. They also run a first class livery and feed stable in connection with the house; also handle farm machinery and deal in real estate.

Samuel Garland: Came to Graham County in the spring of 1879, and located on a fine tract of land six miles southwest of Nicodemus; he has it well stocked and is numbered among the best farmers in this part of the county. This spring (1886) he opened up a first class implement house in our town and is having a brisk trade in that line of business. Mr. G. is also a real estate agent and will accommodate you with anything in that line.

Jonas Moore: Is the general stone mason for this vicinity, and as a workman in that line cannot be excelled.

S. P. Roundtree is another old settler; he was secretary of the Nicodemus colony and came here with the first immigrants in 1877. He is now building a fine residence in the northwest part of town.

Public School: Our public school is being taught by Miss Susie Wyatt. She is well qualified for teaching and is giving the best of satisfaction to the patrons of the school.

Religious: There is an organization of Baptist church here, with Rev. S. M. Lee, pastor; also, a society of Methodist under the pastoral charge of Rev. Brown. There are two stone church buildings in the town.

J. A. Weaver: Mr. J. A. Weaver established in the grocery business in Nicodemus in 1884 and has been receiving a good trade. He is now erecting a good substantial store building on the southwest corner of the public square. Mr. Weaver is another pioneer of this country, and by perseverance is making it win.

Mrs. Eliza Smith:- Came here last fall from Denver, Colo. and is erecting a fine large building on south Main Street to be used as a hotel. She is a pleasant lady and will no doubt meet with success."

I have copied each of the above items from Vol. 1, No. 1 of the "Western Cyclone" which bears the date of

Thursday, May 13, 1886. The underscored dates are mine, those not underscored are as written.

If there is any other information that I can get for you, kindly advise me and I shall be glad to get it for you. School is going along very well with me.

Yours very truly,

(Signed) WENDELL P. SAYERS

NICODEMUS CELEBRATION

Annual Event Will Be Held For The 53rd Time

Next week is the Nicodemus Emancipation Day celebration.

While the celebration is really only two days, July 31 and August 1, it takes the whole week for the affair; the first part of the week to get ready for it, the last part to get over it.

And it will be bigger and better than ever, says "Grave" Scruggs, with that rascally twinkle in his black eyes. R. B. Scruggs has been managing this celebration in his grove for the 53 years of its existence and each year the Negroes come from all parts of the state to celebrate.

Usually the Nicodemus celebration is well attended by politicians seeking county offices at the primary election. This year, for the first time in many years, there is not a county contest on either ticket for primary voters. The only contests are in districts or townships.

But don't get the idea that the Emancipation Day celebration will be a flop just because of no politics. Oh, my no. There will be plenty of "speakin'" on August 1. Bill Zerbuken of Dodge City, popular peace officer, who is now with the state highway patrol, will be the main speaker, it is announced. Wm. Burke, Democrat gubernatorial candidate is also on the program. Elisha Scott, notable colored

attorney of Topeka is also scheduled to appear. Then there will be stands and dance platforms and other entertainment for all who attend.

Baseball games, horseshoe pitching and a general good time in that popular grove of trees known all over the county as Scruggs grove.

This event has become so popular and gained such fame that "Life" magazine, the picture magazine, has made inquiry in regard to the event and may have a photographer at the celebration to take pictures to be used in the magazine.

HILL CITY TIMES, Volume 59, Number 5, p. 1
Thursday, July 25, 1940
Hill City, Graham County, Kansas

1851

EN EMERITUS

1941

DEAR FOLK:

By some mysterious providence
Whose moods none dare dispute,
My span of life--full ninety years,
Looms like a mountain butte.
As scanned from every vantage point
Scenes pass in swift review,
And blend like links of endless chain,
The old into the new.

Adown that long and devious trail
Were many views and thrills
Which made the blood flush in my veins
And some depressing spills.
To one and all such is life's law,
Nor can they it evade;
The variance is essential
To complete man--as made.

So here am I, though somewhat frayed
By excess, passion, toil;
I've had my fling, a glorious one:
None else did I embroil.
I've dropped my bucket where I was,
What came up was my toll;
I spent it freely, lavishly,
With heart and mind, and soul.

What talents were entrusted me
By Him who knows what's best,
Were displayed in the market place
With ardor and with zest.
In every town, community
And place where I have dwelt,
In race and church, nation and state,
My influence was felt.

While in nowise a superman,
What fame I have attained
Is common fact to high and low,
And so it will remain.
The greatest boon that came to me--
One which I prize the most,
Is "My Folk"--blood and in-laws all--
A large and loyal host.

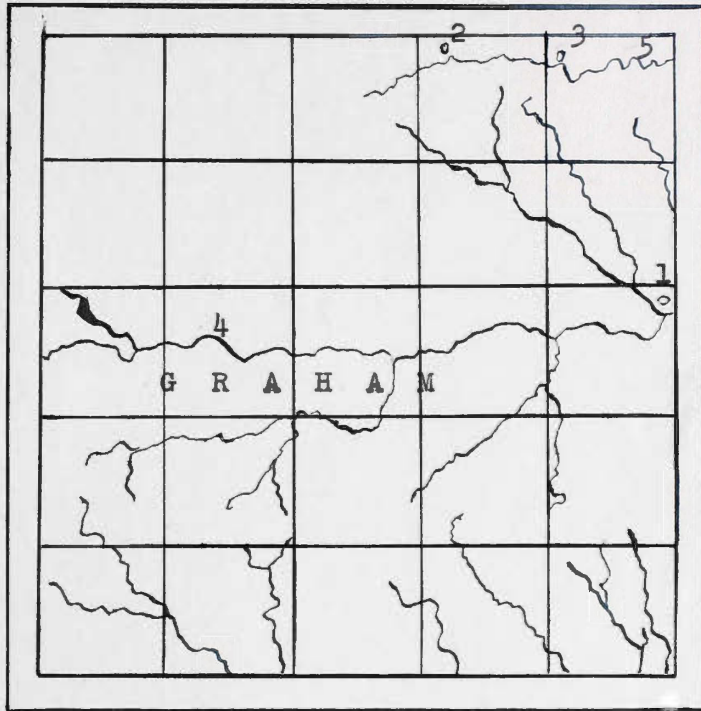
They're scattered wide, the country 'round,
Chins up, and unafraid,
And what their hands have found to do,
Each strives to make the grade.
May each and all, where'er they bide,
Have comfort, health and peace,
Doing their bit as best they can,
Long after my decease.

Yours, forever and for aye,

ABRAM THOMPSON HALL, SR.,

Pittsburgh, Pa., April 25, 1941.

Map of Graham County, Kansas, 1878



Towns

1. Nicodemus
2. Houston
3. Graham

Black lines

4. South Fork Solomon River
5. Bow Creek